

Don't Put Out The Light

let me see again - I

queenjameskirk

Don't Put Out The Light by queenjameskirk

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Summary:

"Eddie has always loved Bill best, until he meets Richie."

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Author's Note:

this follows book and movie canon somewhat, blended together into a messy conglomeration of angst and spooks, but i also tweaked a few things to fit my timeline.

this was started because i was struck by inspiration to write a scene of adult eddie making out with richie and bill at the same time. if you can't tell already, things Got Away From Me a bit.

*and your hands are really shakin' something awful
as you light your 27th cigarette
oh how long have you been sitting in the darkness?
you forget*

-crazy baby, joan osborne

Eddie has always loved Bill best.

When they were kids, it was because he looked at Bill as a big brother, someone who would go to the ends of the earth to protect Eddie. Eddie doesn't have any siblings and would have probably had a lonely childhood had he not met Bill in first grade. Instead, his childhood is full of playing hide and seek in Bill's house with one of the other neighborhood boys, Stan. His childhood is coming over to Bill's house the day his parents bring Georgie home from the hospital and watching Bill hold the baby carefully on his lap, his mom showing him how to hold his hand under Georgie's neck. His childhood is sleepovers on the floor of Bill's bedroom, getting his own goodnight kiss from Georgie, and waking up at the break of dawn to play Legos.

As they get older, their playdates become less digging in the sandbox in Bill's backyard and more biking to the other's house to watch

movies. Bill walks Eddie to class and holds his books and even has a spare aspirator in his backpack for when Eddie has a surprise attack. He sets his own watch to beep when it's time for Eddie to take his medication.

Even Sonia Kaspbrak loves Bill. He's polite and well-mannered and clean. He takes his shoes off in the front hall and stutters out pleases and thank yous. One night he even comes over for dinner and does all the dishes, sleeves rolled up to his elbows. Sonia turns to her son and asks him why he can't be a good boy like Bill and Eddie blushes and looks down at his feet. She can't help but be charmed by the blue eyes and Denbrough smile.

She loves Bill because she doesn't know how often Bill uses those blue eyes to convince her son to go swimming in the quarry or to help him dig a hole to China in the mud. She doesn't know that Eddie would die for Bill.

Eddie is eleven when he realizes his love for Bill is different. Because yeah, he likes their other friend, Stan. He likes Stan's hair and he likes going over to Stan's for dinner. He looks up to Stan too, like another brother, but he doesn't love Stan the way he loves Bill. He doesn't look into Stan's hazel eyes and think I would jump off a bridge to save you.

He spends the second half of the year having pretty much constant panic attacks, going home at night and crying in his bed because he's so sure there's something wrong with him. There has to be. All the other boys talk about the girls in their class, commenting on their hair and perfume, but Eddie couldn't care less.

Stan gets a crush on one of the girls in the grade above them and Eddie has to sit at lunch and listen to Stan wax on and on about her hair and her freckles. Bill nods occasionally but his eyes are far off and Eddie wonders if Bill likes girls the way Stan does; wonders if Bill dreams about Stacy Matthews in the same way Eddie dreams about him.

He knows it isn't normal to have these thoughts about his best friend, to dream about kissing him and holding his hand, but Eddie can't help it. Bill is his best friend and there's nothing that can be done to

change that. Loving Bill feels like fate.

Eddie has always loved Bill best, until he meets Richie.

Richie waltzes into his eighth grade English class on the first day of school wearing a Hawaiian shirt and a pair of chucks that Eddie had begged his mom to buy him for Christmas the year before. Eddie knows of him, the troublemaker that all their teachers refer to as “That Tozier boy,” but he has never actually met the kid before.

Richie slides into the seat behind and to the left of Eddie, kicking his feet out in a sprawl. He asks the girl in front of him for a pencil, and then Mrs. Blake is asking them what they read over the summer and Eddie turns his attention from the boy with the messy hair.

By the end of their 42 minute class period, Richie has already managed to piss Eddie off three times.

So of course they become best friends.

Richie is loud, so obnoxious sometimes that it hurts, but he’s soft too. He can dish out insult after insult, joking about Eddie’s hair and his mother and his bike but as soon as he feels his words hit too close to home, he pulls back. He turns to Eddie and flashes him a small secret smile, reassuring him, and Eddie knows they’re okay. He sees under all the jokes and deflections, sees right to Richie Tozier’s core.

Sometimes it feels like Eddie and Richie were made for each other. It’s apparent every time Richie insults him and Eddie shoots back a response without thinking. The words are lighting fast and they spill out of his mouth as if they were always meant to be spoken.

“That’s a real pretty shirt, Eds, where’d you get it?” Richie says once, plucking at the collar of Eddie’s favorite pink polo.

“From your sister’s bedroom floor, Tozier,” he responds and Richie has a gobsmacked look on his face for a moment until he collects himself and schools his mouth into a smirk. Then he’s leaning forward and putting Eddie in a headlock, his hands joined over Eddie’s hair and his body shaking with laughter.

“I love this kid!” Richie tells their friends and Eddie swivels to beat a

fist into Richie's side, escaping the headlock with his dignity certainly not intact.

He spends increasing time with Richie, going over to his house after school to play video games and following him to the Barrens to pretend adventure. He has dinner with Richie's parents, watching them trade jokes across the table. Richie's dad is quick witted, calling Richie his "idiot child" with a smile so fond that Eddie can feel it in his heart. Richie's mom runs her hand through her son's curls and loops one around her finger, a gesture so loving Eddie feels like an intruder. But the Toziers aren't afraid to express affection and Richie's mom kisses him on the forehead when he leaves later that night.

"Ride home safe," she says and her motherly warning is nothing like the reprimands he receives from his own mother. Her words are warm and come from a place of concern, not fear. Richie's dad pats him on the shoulder, his big hand tender, and invites him to come back for family game night on Thursday. Richie smiles at Eddie and elbows his dad away, lingering at the front door as his parents pretend not to listen from the other room.

"He wasn't kidding," Richie says, hands in his pockets. His glasses are slipping down his nose and Eddie finds himself wanting to push them up and then kiss him on the nose. He shoves his hands in his own pockets to keep from doing it. "He'll be really sad if you don't come over for game night."

"I'd love to come over," Eddie says, "But my mom might not let me. You know, missing dinner two days a week," he explains. Richie's face is sad and Eddie feels guilty and yet somehow pleased about it. It feels kinda good to see Richie disappointed over not getting to see him.

"Pinky swear you'll try?" Richie asks, holding his hand out. His pinky is outstretched and he wiggles it a little, wagging his eyebrows. Eddie pretends to consider.

"Monopoly or scrabble?" he asks, narrowing his eyes. Richie grins and opens his mouth but is interrupted.

“Monopoly!” Mr. Tozier calls from the other room. Eddie and Richie laugh until there are tears in the corner of their eyes, leaning against the walls of the front hall. He has to pull his inhaler out of his pocket and trigger it to finally be able to get a big breath. When they finally calm down, Eddie interlocks his pinky with Richie’s and makes a promise. Richie waits a moment before pulling Eddie in, wrapping his arms around him in a hug. He smells like that weird adult cologne he’s started wearing, the one with the bottle that looks like a man’s torso.

“See ya at school tomorrow, Eddie Spaghetti,” he says.

“That’s not my name, you idiot,” Eddie replies.

He rides his bike home feeling warm and loved.

Eddie drifts away from Bill slowly, so slow he doesn’t even notice at first. One day he’s dreaming about Bill’s smile and the next he’s waking up to the hazy memory of Richie’s laugh. It’s like a flip is switched in his brain and everything goes from Bill, Bill, Bill, to Richie, Richie, Richie.

Georgie goes missing that fall, on a wet day in October.

Bill calls him almost immediately, stuttering over the line that Georgie’s gone. Eddie hangs up, hands shaking, and immediately pulls on his boots to go over to Bill’s house. He lies to his mom, tells her he’s going to bed early, and then goes to his room and climbs out the window.

It’s storming outside and the wind blows the rain into the open window, whipping his hair. He pulls the hood of his jacket up over his head, tightening it the best he can, and swings a leg over the side of the window. The house is only one level but it’s still fair drop from his window to the ground. His knees buckle under him and he rolls through the wet grass, mud squelching under his back. His bike is lying on its side in the back yard and he wheels it around the side. He rubs his hands on his jeans, trying to dry them, and then climbs over his bike and sets off to Bill’s house.

He rides the short blocks as fast as his legs can go, paying no caution

to the slippery sidewalks and rivers of rain that race through the gutter. The wind blows the hood of his jacket off and the rain runs through his hair and down his face but he doesn't stop to fix it. He gets soaked within the minute.

It's raining hard enough that Eddie wonders if the whole town of Derry won't get swept away, down into the gutter, never to be seen again.

When he gets to Bill's house, it's dark. He knocks three times on the front door and after not getting a response, tries it to see if it's locked. It isn't.

"Bill, it's me," he calls as he opens the door, peeling off his jacket and stepping out of his boots. He drips rainwater on the hardwood floor, his hair plastered to his head.

There's a light on in the hall but otherwise the house is pitch black, illuminated only by the grey afternoon sunshine that streams in through open windows. A sudden burst of lightning flashes through the room, followed by thunder that shakes the pictures on the wall.

"Bill?" Eddie calls again, walking down with socked feet. His steps make no sound, the rain drowning out all signs of life. He follows the hall to the kitchen, skirting around Bill's mom's piano, and peers into the living room. Bill isn't tucked away on the couch, or sitting at the kitchen table, or curled up in the breakfast nook.

Eddie is about to turn around and climb upstairs when he notices something.

The basement door is open.

Warm yellow light spills out of the doorway, shining on the wood floor and beckoning Eddie in. He steps carefully towards it, the floorboards creaking under his feet. The light is inviting, as if it's begging Eddie to come and investigate.

Another clap of thunder sounds, rattling a cup on the kitchen counter, and Eddie jumps. He turns to look out the window and the rain has picked up, making the entire world a dark grey blur. The

wind is howling, shaking trees and breaking branches.

“Bill?” Eddie whispers, trying not to disturb the odd peace that has settled over the house.

The light flickers, there one moment and gone the next, almost as if the power has tripped. Eddie stops in his tracks and stares hard at the open door. He can't see further down than three or four steps, the wood seeming to just stop in an abyss of blackness. Without yellow light spilling out, the doorway is unnerving, with a stairway that leads to nothing but darkness.

The temptation to go down the stairs grows slowly into horror, a fear that Eddie doesn't quite understand, but it's paralyzing. He can't move forward or away, stuck in his tracks as if he's been glued to the floor. The wood under his feet is cold, seeping through his socks and chilling him to the bone. He reaches shaking fingers to his back pants pocket and pulls his inhaler out, just in case. The wind howls louder.

The power flicks on and the yellow light is back. Eddie screams.

There's a red balloon in the doorway.

It floats a few feet above the ground, white string hanging down and brushing the floor. It drifts slowly towards Eddie, as if it's being blown by a draft that Eddie can't feel, bobbing through the air with no resistance.

It drifts closer and Eddie can see it has writing on the other side. Almost as if it knows Eddie wants to see what it says, it starts spinning. The words become clear and Eddie feels his heart leap into his throat, terror choking him.

PENNYWISE GETS ANOTHER ONE it says in white block letters
GEORGIE DENBROUGH FLOATS LIKE A BOAT.

Eddie reads the words over and over, trying to find the meaning in them, heart racing in his chest.

Another flash of lighting, more thunder that shakes the foundation, and Eddie is raising his arm. He reaches shaking fingers out slowly, drawn to touching the balloon with intuition he doesn't understand.

He brushes his fingers against it and it feels real; slippery with latex, taut with pressure. It's impossible.

Then the balloon pops, like a bomb going off in the silence, and the light goes out and for a moment, Eddie swears he sees something in the basement. It's just a flash, more a memory of sight than anything concrete, but Eddie is almost positive he sees a man standing on the top step. Not just a man, but a clown. A clown with red tufts of hair and a sly smile, holding its pointer finger up to its lips in a gesture to stay silent.

"Eddie?" a hoarse voice rings out and Eddie jumps, a scream caught in his throat. He spins around to see Bill, standing in the door to the hall with pajamas on and a blanket wrapped around his shoulders. Eddie turns back around.

The clown is gone. The basement door is closed. Light spills out from the crack under the door for a long second and then flickers away.

Eddie wipes his tears away, tears he didn't even know he had been crying, and turns back to Bill.

"Hey, Big Bill," Eddie greets, willing his heart rate to settle back to normal. He breathes hard, trying desperate to fill his lungs, but the air gets caught in his throat, and all he can think about is that impossible red balloon and the ghost in Bill's basement. He can't get a deep breath and he starts to panic but then he remembers the inhaler in his hand and uses it quickly, letting the medicine coat his throat. The air comes easier then, and he can remember where he is and who he's with. He's with Bill now, and nothing can ever hurt him when Bill is around.

"W-why are you in the k-k-kitchen?" Bill asks.

"Was looking for you," Eddie explains weakly but Bill is obviously in no mood to argue, to ask why Eddie hands is outstretched toward to the basement and why he was having an asthma attack in Bill's kitchen. Bill just nods and shifts on his feet a little awkwardly, pulling his blanket harder around his shoulders. His cheeks and nose are pink with fever, hair greasy and stuck to his forehead with sweat.

"I thought I heard you c-call my nuh-name," Bill says lamely and Eddie wonders which time. Was it when he first came in or had Bill somehow heard the soft exhalation of Eddie's breath; the call that was no louder than a whisper?

"I came to make sure you were okay," Eddie says quietly. "Where are your mom and dad?"

"They went out to look for him," Bill says and his face crumples. He pulls his chin into his chest and lifts the blanket to cover his face as he cries, as if he's afraid of Eddie seeing him.

It's the most pathetic he's ever looked and Eddie is suddenly so guilty that they've drifted apart. He's moving to Bill before he can stop himself, wrapping his arms around his friend and holding him tight. Bill's shoulders shake under his arms, wracking with sobs. He feels so thin and fragile under Eddie's hands and he wonders when he became Bill's protector.

"I missed you," Bill says, breath brushing Eddie's hair.

"I missed you too," Eddie replies and gives him one last squeeze before pulling away. Bill's nose is runny and he's started shaking again, as if he's cold. "Let's get you back to bed," Eddie whispers, tugging at the blanket on Bill's shoulder to lead him upstairs.

Bill avoids his own bedroom, passing by the open door without a glance. He doesn't take Eddie to Georgie's either, where just beyond the edge of the doorframe Eddie can see the corner of Georgie's bed, his night light casting shadows on the room. Georgie's teddy bear is on its side, staring out into the night with unblinking eyes. Eddie tears his eyes away from Georgie's room and follows Bill to the master bedroom at the end of the hall.

They settle onto Bill's parents' bed, climbing up and crawling under the heavy duvet. The rain patters against the window, running down it in rivulets. Eddie lays on his side, turned toward Bill. Bill snuffles as he shifts under the covers, his blue eyes wet.

"What if they d-don't f-f-find him?" Bill whispers. Eddie isn't sure how to respond, so he doesn't. He just rolls over and hugs Bill,

wrapping his arm around the other boy's body and pulling him towards himself. Bill comes willingly, pressing his wet face into Eddie's shoulder, and starts sobbing. He weeps bone-racking tears, sniffing and coughing from the exertion. Eddie can't even bring himself to be disgusted by his sickness. Bill's shoulders shake and Eddie holds on for dear life.

"I s-s-s-should have bu-been w-w-with h-him," he cries into Eddie's neck. Eddie is selfishly glad he wasn't.

Somehow, Bill cries himself to sleep. Eddie wonders if he should extract himself from bed and get home before his mom realizes he's gone, but then Bill whimpers in his sleep and wraps himself tighter around Eddie. He decides to try and catch some rest too and falls asleep warm and content.

Bill's parents come home nearing midnight that night, soaked to the bone, without their son and with no information.

Eddie wakes up when they come into the room, lifting his head from underneath the blankets. He's warm and Bill's forehead is pressed to his neck, wet with sweat, like his fever broke sometime during their nap. Bill's parents are quiet but Eddie's sleep has been restless and their whispers are gunshot loud in the silence.

Bill's mom looks utterly wrecked, her shoulders slumped and mascara running down her face. Bill's dad is similarly upset, but he expresses his loss in anger. His fists are clenched and trembling, as if he's suppressing the urge to hit something. His shoulders are tense and he flinches when Bill stirs at Eddie's side and sits up.

"D-Did ya find him?" Bill whispers groggily. His dad's shoulders deflate and he shares a dead-eyed look with Bill's mom.

"Time for bed, boys," Bill's dad says tiredly, and he leans down to pull the covers off Bill and Eddie.

They go to Bill's room, stepping on the creaky floor with bare feet. Bill's room is cold, denied any body heat for hours, and his bed is unmade. Bill climbs into it and gets under the covers. Eddie grabs the spare pillow from the closet in the hall and begins to make a bed on

the floor but is stopped by Bill's broken voice.

"C-can you h-hold muh-me again?" he asks, so quiet that Eddie is afraid he imagined it. But when he looks over, Bill's blue eyes are desperate. He nods, a slow thing, and climbs next to him. The sheets are soft and blue, cool on Eddie's hot skin. He lays his head down next to Bill on the pillow and stares at the ceiling, mapping the stucco and trying to find patterns. Eventually, he feels Bill shift to face him and he turns to do the same.

Bill is staring at him, his eyes dry and serious. Eddie breathes slowly, blinking. Bill's eyes flick down to his mouth once and then he's leaning in, his lips a centimeter from touching Eddie's. His breath is warm, a little stale, and his eyelashes brush Eddie's cheek. He waits a moment, giving Eddie an opportunity to move away, and then he leans the rest of the way in, pressing his lips to Eddie's.

His lips are chapped, dry in the fall air, but he's warm and familiar and Eddie presses back against him tentatively.

They don't do anything more than share a few closed mouth kisses, breathing each other's air and moving their lips with an unpracticed rhythm, but Eddie feels closer to Bill than he ever has before. It feels like every bit of space between them has evaporated, leaving them locked like puzzle pieces, slotted together after an eternity of waiting.

Suddenly Eddie's crying, his tears tracking down his cheeks and mixing in with Bill's freckles.

"I'm sorry," he whispers against Bill's mouth.

"It's o-k-k-kay, Eds," Bill returns and presses a kiss against the edge of Eddie's mouth, almost missing.

"It's not," Eddie argues and breaks off into a sob. It's like the entire year is catching up with him and he thinks he might die from the guilt that bubbles up in his chest. He's been spending all his time with Richie, focusing on forgetting Bill, and now here he is, in Bill's bed. Disbelief and a deep boneless sorrow mix themselves around in his stomach and he kisses Bill desperately to get it to stop from coming out of him.

He's frantic and Bill soothes him. Bill, the one Eddie is supposed to be comforting, makes everything better. He kisses Eddie's cheeks and eyelids and nose, feather light and full of so much affection that Eddie falls in love with him all over again.

When Eddie has finally stopped crying, Bill ceases. He presses one last wet kiss to Eddie's cheek and then rolls over, his back to Eddie. Eddie scoots forward and wraps his arms around Bill's chest, pulling him back to fit against Eddie's front.

"Goodnight, Bill," he whispers into the dark. His voice is hoarse. Bill hums back and then responds.

"Goodnight, Eds," he says and waits a beat. "I l-luh-love you,"

Eddie doesn't respond until he's sure Bill has fallen asleep, his chest rising and falling slowly under Eddie's hands. The rain continues to fall outside and Eddie whispers his words so quietly he knows they can't be heard over the howling wind.

"Love you too, Bill,"

He doesn't sleep a wink. He just holds onto Bill and listens to him breathe. He can't get the image of the clown out of his head.

Eddie bikes home early the next morning, leaving only just after Bill's parents wake up. They're going out to look again, gathering the neighborhood together to form a search team. The world is still gray, but the rain has stopped. It's quiet, like the whole world is still sleeping, and the only sounds are Eddie's wheels against the ground and the chain of his bike rattling. The streets are damp and his lawn is covered in a layer of dew that makes grass stick to the rubber on his sneakers. Eddie sneaks in his window and goes back to bed in his own room, sliding under cool covers. His mom wakes him up later to tell him about Georgie and he feigns surprise.

"It's dangerous out there, Eddie," his mom wheezes, her eyes wild with fear. "Promise me you won't go out after dark."

"Yes, mommy," Eddie promises, nodding despite the knot in his throat. He doesn't tell her about going to Bill's house and he certainly

doesn't tell her about the ghost, a clown with pale skin and yellowed teeth.

Eddie spends the next week sick in bed, having caught Bill's cold, while the entire town searches for its missing children.

They don't find anything.

It's as if Georgie has disappeared into thin air.

Georgie Denbrough Floats Like A Boat, a sinister voice whispers in Eddie's head.

Despite all they go through that summer, Eddie and Bill drift back apart after It. He tries hard to hold onto their friendship, repaired slightly by their shared trauma, but they've grown into different people. With no killer clown to bring them together, they simply go back to how life was before all this started. And for them, going back to normal means ignoring each other unless they're with the entire group.

Bill spends a lot of time with Beverly before she goes to Portland and Eddie pretends it doesn't hurt him. He wants to be happy for Bill, to be proud that his friend has found someone to share his heart with, but it burns him. The possibility that Bill's going to give parts of himself to Beverly that he would never consider giving to Eddie is a terrifying realization.

Eddie counterbalances his pain by spending more time with Richie than he did before. He pushes down the sting of Bill abandoning him and pours his entire being into loving Richie. He's pretty sure Richie loves him too, can tell by the way he smiles and squints his eyes when Eddie laughs at one of his rare funny jokes. He lets himself be pulled into Richie's orbit and tries to forget all about Bill Denbrough.

It doesn't go well.

There was a moment, way back in Neibolt house, where Eddie had been so sure the last thing he was going to see before he died was Richie's face. Richie had grabbed his head and made Eddie look at

him, clutching his face between shaking hands. Richie's hands were on his face and Bill's arm was around his shoulder. And for just a moment, Eddie had been able to forget the pain in his arm and the fucking Clown in front of them. Because he was surrounded by his two best friends and he was safe.

The memory, of Neibolt and the Clown, won't leave him. He wakes up from nightmares all the time, shuddering and choking as the leper chases him, only this time he doesn't get away. He dreams about the clown slitting Richie's throat and painting Eddie with the blood that spouts out. He dreams about Georgie, little Georgie, biting Bill's arms off, his tiny mouth black with gore.

He has a strange dream late one night, following a day spent at the arcade with Richie and Stan. He dreams he's in an unfamiliar house, stalking down a long white hallway. The walls are full of picture frames but Eddie doesn't recognize a single person in any of the photos.

He's following the sound of dripping water. It echoes through the entire house, louder than his breathing, louder than his footsteps. He knows it's coming from the room at the end of the hall, a half-closed door with white light spilling out of it. He pushes it open with a pale hand and steps inside.

It's a bathroom. The tile floor is white, pristine and sparkling.

There's a man in the claw-foot bathtub. He's tall, his feet dangling limply over the back, and his arms are resting against the edge of the tub. His hair is curly and vaguely familiar. The dripping noise is the faucet, a leak that splashes into the tub every few seconds.

"Hello?" Eddie asks and the man doesn't stir. The dripping continues. "Who are you?" Eddie presses and takes another step towards him.

Suddenly, as Eddie takes his step forward, the man's wrists start bleeding. There's no weapon around him, no blade he could have cut himself on. It's as if they've opened up on their own and then he's bleeding all over the tile floor. The blood mixes in with the water in the tub, turning it a light pinkish color.

Eddie makes to help him, turning and grabbing a towel off the sink, but stops in his tracks when spins back. The man is staring at him.

His eyes are dead, bloodshot and pale. His mouth is open in a silent scream and his face is so familiar. His wrists continue to bleed over the floor and the blood has almost reached Eddie's feet. There are fingerprints of blood all over the tub now, Eddie realizes, like he's tried to pull himself out of it and failed. He turns back to the door, to leave, to get out of this house and this dream.

"Eddie," the corpse whispers behind him. He turns slowly, so slowly, and is greeted by the corpse standing in the tub. His blood runs down his arms, a tattoo of gore. Pink water sloshes over the side of the tub as he sways in place, soaking into the bathmat and spreading further across the floor. It soaks into Eddie's shoes. The drip from the faucet continues.

"Eddie," it repeats and Eddie finally, finally places the face. He feels his mouth drop open in horror.

It's Stan. It's Stanley Uris as an adult.

Stan is dead, bleeding out over the floor of this bathroom. He's dead and he killed himself, slit his wrists in the bath. Eddie feels his heart race, his breath coming in shallow pants.

Eddie watches, frozen, as Stan dips a finger in the blood pooling on his palm. He uses the blood to write a message on the wall and then he turns and smiles at Eddie. His teeth are red with blood.

He sits back down in the bath. Eddie spots the weapon now, a razor blade tucked next to a bar of soap. There's blood congealing on it, sticking it to the floor.

On the wall, written with perfect script in Stan's blood, is the word IT.

Eddie wakes up with a scream caught in his throat and no memory of the nightmare that put it there.

He spends the rest of what little there is left of his summer avoiding sleep. He stays up and reads, devouring books night after night.

Sometimes, he calls Richie and talks to him until three in the morning, listening to Richie tell him nonsense about video games and movies until he falls asleep with the phone pressed between his face and the pillow.

When he sees Richie the next day, Richie teases him about his snoring over the phone and Eddie doesn't tell him the first decent night of sleep he got all night was because Richie had lulled him into slumber.

The day Eddie gets the cast off his arm, he bikes to Richie's house. The air is cool on his finally bare arm, his skin pink and shiny where the cast had rubbed it raw for six weeks. He pedals down the blocks with a light chest. The air is growing crisp, fall fast approaching. Soon the school year will be starting and they can forget all about this long summer.

He knocks on the door and waits with his arms clasped behind his back for Richie to open it.

"Hey, Eds," Richie greets, leaning against the door frame. His glasses are sliding down his nose again, perpetually too big for his head, and Eddie grins.

"Hi, Rich," he replies. Richie looks at him for a moment and then tilts his head.

"So... what's up?" he asks and Eddie stifles a giggle. He lifts a shoulder in a shrug brings his arms around to cross them in front of his chest. It takes Richie a moment but his eyes flick to Eddie's right arm and then his mouth is dropping open in a delighted smile.

"You got the cast off!" he cheers. "Now we can finally go swimming in the quarry again!"

"It's like 65 degrees, Richie," Eddie says, rolling his eyes, and Richie scoffs.

"Yeah, but you're finally free! We've gotta celebrate Eds," he argues and pulls Eddie in his house to search for his swim suit.

They spend the afternoon freezing, splashing each other in the clear

water of the quarry and trying not to let the other see how cold they both are. The sun is warm though and it shines down on them, illuminating the water and reflecting in Richie's brown eyes.

"You should get it tattooed," Richie says, running his pointer finger lightly over the place where the pharmacist's daughter had written LOSER in permanent marker. Richie had loved the way Eddie wrote over it. They're laid out on a rock, trying to soak up every last bit of summer sun they can. His finger raises goosebumps on Eddie's arm. "Remind everyone that you're a lover, not a fighter,"

"Gotta be eighteen to get a tattoo," Eddie says, eyes closed. The wind ruffles his drying hair and he feels Richie run his finger down to trace the lines on his palm.

"I'll do it," Richie reasons. "Bev told me you can do it with a ballpoint pen and a needle."

"I'm not letting you anywhere near me with a needle," Eddie says, furrowing his eyebrows. Richie's hand traces up his pointer finger and back down before continuing onto his middle finger. The touch is so light that Eddie almost can't feel it and it tracks back and forth over every one of his fingers.

Richie comes back down and goes lightly over Eddie's scar, the mark from where Bill had sliced his hand. The spot where he had pressed his bleeding palm against Richie's, mixing their blood together and making an oath. A promise of forever. A promise to remember.

That day feels like a lifetime ago. It feels like something that happened to someone else, a person who Eddie can't quite believe he used to be.

Richie presses his fingernail down into the scar, just a touch too hard, and Eddie gasps lightly at the pain.

"Sorry," Richie whispers, an exhalation of breath, and Eddie opens his eyes. Richie's cheeks are pink and his eyes are wide, staring into Eddie's own with an intensity that makes Eddie's breath quicken. He brings Eddie's hand up to his mouth and presses a kiss to the scar, lips brushing the raised skin. He drops the hand down from his

mouth but he keeps it clasped in his own.

Eddie leans in quickly and fits his mouth against Richie's before he can talk himself out of it. Richie lets out a surprised sound but he bounces back quickly. He kisses Eddie enthusiastically, closing his eyes and tilting his head just a bit to the right. His glasses dig into Eddie's nose but he can't bring himself to break apart to take them off Richie's face.

The quarry is peaceful, full of the sounds of nature, and Eddie feels himself relax into Richie's mouth. He brings a hand up to cup Richie's jaw and it feels right, like his face is supposed to fit in his hand perfectly. He breathes in deep through his nose and fills his lungs, feeling like he's going to burst, before his exhales with a sigh.

When they finally part, breathing just a little hard, Richie's hand is tangled in Eddie's own. His fingers slot themselves between Eddie's and he holds hard.

"I'm never gonna forget you," Richie promises, leaning forward to rest his forehead against Eddie's. Eddie tries to cross his eyes, to look into Richie's and see the sincerity there, but it hurts so he closes his eyes instead and leans in to peck Richie's lips one last time.

"I'll never forget you either," Eddie promises.

It's a lie.

He doesn't forget immediately. He spends his ninth grade year holding hands with Richie in the hallway when there's no one else around. He spends Christmas at Richie's house, eating dinner with them and being shocked when there are a plethora of gifts for him under the tree as well. He sits with Stan in the stands at every home football game, listening to Richie commentate from the press box. He even spends a couple of nights at Bill's house, relearning Bill's smile and laugh.

It's the best school year of Eddie's life.

That summer, Eddie visits his great-aunt in New York and forgets all about Derry, Maine. When he thinks of home, the only image he

conjures up is that of a cold bedroom and a boring town with nothing to do. When August rolls around, Eddie has forgotten all about his friends back home and begs his mom to let him stay with his aunt for the next school year.

He attends high school and eventually college in New York, convincing himself that he's always belonged in the city. His childhood is nothing but a distant memory, the hidden foundations of the man he becomes.

Twenty years later, Mike Hanlon is the one who brings him back.

He calls Eddie's landline, his voice crackling over the speaker, and begs Eddie to come back. The mere sound of his voice makes a tidal wave of memory wash over Eddie, the puzzle pieces of his past fitting back together in a moment. He suddenly remembers summers spent running; always running away from something. There are still parts missing, jagged edges that Eddie ponders over the entire drive back home, but Eddie knows somehow that something bad happened in Derry, something that Eddie has buried deep deep down and forgotten about until now.

When he arrives in town, he finds Mike at the Derry public library. It is apparent that he is the first to arrive because Mike is completely unprepared to see him. He explains that he didn't expect anyone until at least tomorrow but he hugs Eddie hard, stronger as a man than he had been when they were kids. He still has that white-toothed smile that Eddie loved him for, though, and he is still just as kind and mild.

Mike invites him back to his house, a two story place on Palmer Lane, near the neighborhood Eddie used to live in. He explains that he can't possibly expect Eddie to pay for a hotel when he has more than enough space for everyone, so Eddie shoulders his duffle bag and climbs into the passenger seat of Mike's truck.

On the drive over, Eddie spares a lingering thought to whatever happened to his childhood home—the bungalow with its small windows and shag carpeting. He has a vague recollection of sneaking out of his bedroom window in the middle of the night but it disappears in a puff of smoke as they pull up to the curb in front of Mike's house.

He and Mike share a beer in the kitchen and Mike fills him in, telling him about his journal and the various murders across Derry. He sounds so sad, hopeless, as he tells Eddie about the missing kids. He doesn't share a hypothesis about who's killing them and there's a nagging feeling at the back of Eddie's head that he can't get over.

"How did you know to call me?" Eddie questions, and Mike pauses. "Cause until your name showed up on caller ID, I had forgotten all about you and Derry."

"I honestly don't know," Mike says, "All I know is I felt this pull, and it directed me to you. It directly me to all of you."

That's when Eddie remembers the crew. A group of seven faceless figures. It hadn't been just him and Mike against the world, no, Eddie realizes that they're still waiting. They're waiting for the rest of the Losers club.

"Is everyone coming here?" Eddie asks and Mike nods, then winces. He takes a swig of his beer and swallows hard.

"Not everyone," Mike says, sighing.

Eddie thinks it's a true tragedy that the first time he remembers Stan Uris in ten years is because he's being told about his death.

He can't remember the last time he cried like this. He sobs into his hands, shoulders heaving, hunched over Mike Hanlon's kitchen table. He feels the tears spill down his cheeks and they flow into his mouth and the salt chokes him, makes him yearn for the days when he had his inhaler on hand at all times. Mike stands and lets Eddie lean into his side, rubbing a hand between Eddie's shoulder blades as soothingly as he can.

When Eddie has cried as many tears as he can for Stan Uris, he wipes his nose and tells Mike he would like to go to bed. Mike shows him to the basement, pulling out the couch to make a bed and fitting it with spare sheets. He hugs Eddie once more, quick and tight, and then he goes upstairs to his room.

It's nearing three am when Eddie finally quiets his racing mind and is

able to fall asleep.

The next morning, a second member of their crew arrives. Eddie's seated at the kitchen table, bleary and white-knuckling a cup of coffee, when the doorbell rings. He looks up at Mike across the table and shrugs.

Mike answers the door and ushers their guest in.

It's Bill Denbrough. Alive and in the flesh.

That's when Eddie realizes he'd forgotten all about Bill. His childhood comes back to him in a flash at the first glimpse of the Denbrough smile. Long days of biking and building dams and seeing movies at the Aladdin. Staring at Bill's face in the sunlight, his clear blue eyes dancing and his nose dotted with freckles. Hiding behind Bill, away from It. Watching Bill smile at Beverly and feeling a sharp knife deep in his chest.

Bill was his first love, Eddie remembers.

The Denbrough smile isn't the same as when they were kids; it's not toothless and wide anymore. Now, Bill smiles like an adult. His happiness is guarded, but genuine.

Eddie is hugging him before Bill can even set down his suitcase.

"Hey, Eddie," Bill says, no trace of his stutter. He lets the suitcase fall out of his hands and crash to the ground and Eddie is faintly aware of Mike stepping into the kitchen.

"I can't believe I forgot you," Eddie says into Bill's shoulder. Of course, no matter how tall Eddie has gotten in adulthood, his friend still towers over him by at least a head.

"It's okay, Eds," Bill says and Eddie remembers something else, remembers Bill saying those exact words, remembers crying and Bill turning away from him. He remembers wrapping his arms around Bill and staying there the entirety of a sleepless night. He can't remember for the life of him what he was crying over, though. "I forgot you too."

"It's really, really good to see you," Eddie confesses and pulls back to scrutinize Bill further. The years have honestly done him well, his body filling out to balance his long arms and legs. He's ditched the baseball tees and chosen to dress in a comfortable-looking flannel and jeans. His hair is thinning and he has slight crow's feet around his eyes, but if anything, the quirks make him more handsome.

"It's good to see you, too," Bill says and Eddie marvels. He's managed to string together at least four sentences now without stuttering once. Eddie wonders what else has happened to Bill that he's missed.

Then Bill leans forward, quicker than Eddie can believe, and kisses him. It's firm, a little off center, and Eddie is pushing back into it without a second thought. He slots his mouth against Bill's and steadies himself by running his hands up Bill's chest to grab hold of the collar on his flannel. He breathes in through his nose and Bill licks over his bottom lip. Eddie sighs a little bit and Bill's breath hitches. He breaks apart for a moment but stays pressed against Eddie.

"Sorry, I couldn't help myself," Bill says against Eddie's mouth, his breath humid on Eddie's face. "For some reason, it feels like I've been waiting twenty years to do that," He's so smooth, adult confidence rolling off him in waves and Eddie once again is full of sadness over everything he's missed in his friends' lives.

He leans back in and plants a kiss on the side of Eddie's mouth, quick and sweet, and then leaves one on Eddie's cheek too. He looks happy and Eddie wonders if Bill knows what awaits them. He wonders if Bill would be so happy if he knew the extent of the trouble they've managed to get themselves back into by returning to Derry.

"Bill, do you know why we're here?" he asks, ruining the moment. Bill turns serious, his guarded smile slipping off his face. His brow furrows and Eddie knows he's straining, trying hard to remember what evil they've come back to fight. He's trying to remember It.

He takes a step back, out of Eddie's space, and crosses his arms. There's a tense second when Eddie thinks Bill is mad at him, for ruining everything again. He remembers now, remembers Bill seeking him for comfort and Eddie letting his own stupid emotions get in the

way.

But then Bill smiles, soft and guarded again.

“Eddie Kaspbrak,” he whispers to himself in a tone of disbelief, shaking his head slightly and bringing his hand up to his mouth for a split second. “Always a challenge,”

After a long moment, Bill scoops up his suitcase and leaves the room. Eddie follows him to the kitchen, finding Mike puttering around and making breakfast. Mike doesn’t mention their flushed faces, nor the dumb smile on Eddie’s face.

“What do we do now?” Bill asks, sinking down onto one of the wooden chairs at the kitchen table. Mike holds up the coffee pot in a question and Bill nods. Mike pours a cup and sets it on the wood in front of Bill, who wraps a big hand around it and takes a sip. Eddie watches them and feels a distant thread unravelling in his chest. It isn’t unknotted completely. Yet.

“Now we wait for the rest,” Mike answers.

Ben arrives next, late in the afternoon, and lets the golden sunshine in the house with him. He’s not the Ben that Eddie suddenly remembers, a Ben who was stout and who loved bad music and who wore adult cologne. Ben has changed more than the rest of them, grown into a thin man whose eyes are almost startlingly empty. He walks with a confidence that the old Ben didn’t have, shoulders back and head tall.

Then comes Bev, knocking on the door at dinnertime. Eddie answers it this time and is greeted by a wave of cigarette smoke. She puts it out before she comes inside, stamping it with the toe of her boot and then flicking the butt to the street. Eddie and Bev had never been particularly close, but he hugs her nonetheless and lets her perfume wash over him.

They order in for dinner and eat it sitting in Mike’s living room, telling stories and basking in the warmth of friendship. Eddie notices that it seems the more time he spends in Derry, the more Bill’s old stutter creeps back into his mouth. It starts slow at first, something he

overlooks as just a struggling to get all his thoughts out at once, but it gets worse as the night goes on. Eddie wonders if Bill even notices.

They spend their time sharing memories, things they think the others couldn't possibly know. Bev tells them about the time she escaped from Henry Bowers by hiding in the clubhouse with Ben. By the time she's finished telling the story, mentioning the moment Belch Huggins had farted directly above their heads, her and Ben are in tears, leaning into each other's space. Ben's eyes are no longer quite as dead as they had been when Eddie had first glimpsed him tonight.

Bill talks about riding Silver, how he hasn't felt as free since he had riding that bike. Ben reminds them of the dam, of the moment they knew they were going to be friends for life. Mike remembers the club house, remembers camouflaging it from the outside world; he reminds them what it was like to be surrounded by friends in a place no one else knew about.

The room is silent when Mike tells them all of Stan's death, and it doesn't hurt any less tonight than it did last night. In fact, it hurts more because tonight Eddie is dry. He's all dried up, with no tears left, so instead he gets to watch clearly as his friends process and grieve.

Bev cries silently, mascara tears tracking down her cheeks. Ben's eyes go empty again, distant and faraway. He downs his glass of scotch in one swallow, not showing a bit of reaction.

Bill looks undone. His neck is red and splotchy and he's covered his eyes with a heavy hand, shielding his face from the room. His shoulders shake with silent sobs and Eddie can't watch for a moment longer. He gets off the floor and settles onto the arm of the couch next to Bill. He reaches a hand out carefully and wraps it around the back of Bill's neck and Bill's shoulders sink as the tension leaves. He leans back into Eddie's touch and Eddie takes it as an invitation to rub softly, soothing Bill through his tears.

They spend a good ten minutes lost in their sadness for Stanley Uris, their fallen friend. Bill pulls himself together first, sniffing loudly and wiping at his eyes with the sleeve of his flannel. Eddie watches as he schools his face, furrowing his eyebrows, and then grabs his drink

from the side table.

“S-Stan would want us to do this,” Bill says finally and gets off the couch. He stands in the middle of the living room and holds up his glass of wine. The stutter is back for just a moment. “He would wuh-want us to make things right,” They all hold up their glasses in acknowledgment. The atmosphere of the room is a vacuum, silent and suffocating. Eddie wonders if they’re all about to choke on their sadness but then Bev is standing as well, her dress rustling around her knees.

Suddenly they’re all standing, a circle around the coffee table in Mike’s living room. There’s an empty space between Bill and Bev, a spot saved for Stan, but there’s one between Eddie and Bill too. Before Eddie can even consider who they could be making room for, Bill is bringing his arm up in a toast.

“For Stan,” he says. Bev clinks her bottle of beer against his glass.

“For Stan,” she agrees. They go around the circle, clinking glasses and tumblers and then they drink, sending out one last toast for Stan Uris. Sending out one last thought for the boy who loved birds and his friends and his family.

After, they return to their storytelling, choosing now to share stories about Stan. They refill their glasses and wipe their tears and try to laugh. Bill reminds them of Stan’s odd humor, of when he used to tell jokes that it seemed like only he got. Mike shares the story of time he and Stan went bird watching on the Hanlon property, telling them about Stan’s enthusiasm and drawings.

Eddie sits back and watches as they go around the circle, drinking and laughing and remembering their shared childhood.

The knot in Eddie’s chest is so close to untangling.

At nine thirty, their long awaited final guest arrives. He knocks a stupid rhythm out on the door and Bill’s eyes widen. It’s obvious he’s remembered who their last friend is, but Eddie is coming up blank when he tries to envision who’s on the other side of Mike’s front door.

Then Mike opens the door, and Eddie almost has an asthma attack for the first time in twenty years.

Because Richie Tozier is on the other side.

His hair is in desperate need of a cut, curling messily around his forehead and ears. He's wearing a pair of faded corduroy pants and black-rimmed glasses, like he stepped off the cover of a Weezer album, and his shirt is desperately wrinkled. He looks somehow nothing and also exactly how Eddie expects.

Eddie remembers all the days he spent fighting with Richie, exchanging insults and jokes about each other's moms, smiling through the anger. It all comes back: riding on the back of Richie's bike to the baseball diamond, studying in Richie's messy bedroom, sitting at the shop while Richie gets his first (illegal) tattoo.

He remembers sunbathing in the quarry, letting Richie run his fingers over his palm. He looks down and sees the scar, so faint and faded that he had completely forgotten it existed. Richie had pressed his lips to it and then kissed Eddie. It was unpracticed and messy and one of the best kisses of Eddie's life. He brings his fingers to his lips and imagines he can still taste Richie there, even after all these years.

If Bill Denbrough was Eddie's first love, Richie was his last.

Bill scoops him into a hug first, tangling long arms around Richie's back and rocking slightly. Richie is stuck shocked for a moment and then Eddie sees his arms come up slowly on Bill's back, running over the smoothness of his shirt and resting at his shoulder blades. He hugs Bill for a moment too long and then he lets go, searching the faces in the room. Bev comes up to him next and Richie lifts her off the ground, twirling her around in his arms like she's a young girl again.

"Hey big guy," Richie greets Ben and slaps his back three times in a row. "Not so big anymore, Haystack," and he laughs that stupid laugh that makes Eddie instinctively bristle. It's the same laugh Richie always spouted when he had just insulted Eddie's mom or his shirt or his bike.

Mike gets a firm handshake and Richie's first serious look of the night. He leans forward to whisper something in Mike's ear that Eddie doesn't hear and Mike nods solemnly.

And then he spins and spots Eddie, who has patiently been waiting for his turn from the arm of the couch.

"Eddie Spaghetti," Richie says and his voice is so fond, brown eyes warmer than Eddie remembers.

"Still not my name," Eddie replies, just for old times sake, and then he's rushing at Richie to hug him.

Richie is now the tallest of the group, which means he towers over Eddie. His arms are long and strong, wrapping completely around Eddie and squeezing. His grip is so tight it's almost suffocating and Eddie wouldn't want it any other way.

Richie rocks back and forth, shifting his weight between his feet, and Eddie lets himself get lost in the shirt pressed to his cheek, Richie's heartbeat a steady rhythm underneath.

"Where's Stan?" Richie asks suddenly, pulling away from the hug to hold Eddie's at arms length and stare in his eyes. Eddie winces and feels a flash of pain in his wrists. Suddenly he envisions Stan, standing naked in the bathtub with his blood running down his arms. He lifts his arm and writes something on the wall in his own blood and Eddie remembers reading it and screaming.

He blinks and he's back in Mike's living room. Richie is searching his face, eyebrows drawn, and then he turns to the rest of the room. Mike's head is down, shoulders heavy with the weight of having to tell everyone about Stan. Eddie sees Bill notice Mike's hesitance and Eddie watches as he takes a deep breath and steels himself before telling Richie the bad news.

Richie looks like he's been punched. It knocks the air out of him and Eddie feels his fingers dig into the back of his shirt, a vice grip that Eddie hopes steady him.

"I'm gonna kill It," he says after a long while. His voice is strong and

terrifying, flat and dark. "For Stan."

"That's the p-plan," Bill agrees and Richie locks eyes with him. They share an electric moment that Eddie doesn't understand. Instead of trying to translate, he just brings Richie back in for another hug.

That night, he shares the basement couch-bed with Richie. The other man ignores all semblance of personal space and latches onto Eddie as soon as he slides into bed, wrapping his arms around Eddie and squeezing. The air is thick between them, charged with an energy that makes Eddie feel like he could take on anything.

"I missed you, Eddie Spaghetti," Richie whispers into the dark, his breath brushing Eddie's ear. Eddie doesn't respond, just moves his head slightly to press a kiss to Richie's clothed shoulder. Adulthood has softened Richie's edges and Eddie finds himself falling in love with his messy hair and stupid laugh all over again.

They do nothing but sleep wrapped around each other and Eddie wakes feeling more refreshed than he has in years. There's a power thrumming under his skin, like he's tapped into this secret reservoir of strength. He feels unstoppable.

That afternoon, they all split up. They go on a walking tour of their hometown, trying to see if they can draw It out of hiding.

Eddie gets back to Mike's house at six thirty, tired and worn. He's run near across the entire town and his chest burns. There's a cut on his knee that's bleeding sluggishly and he knows he has leaves and grass in his hair and stuck to his elbows. Every time he blinks he sees Belch Huggins shambling towards him, wearing a tattered baseball uniform. He sees the corpse of Patrick Hockstetter, stumbling at him across the grass with rotting hands outstretched.

When he stalks up the front porch and in the door, he spots Richie and Bill sitting at the kitchen table, talking lowly.

At some point, Eddie has realized that Richie and Bill have a bond that he doesn't know about. It's apparent in the way they talk sometimes, like they're the only ones in the room and everyone else is just a pawn in their game. Eddie wonders if it's because of what

they saw as kids, what awaited them in the Deadlights.

When he walks in the room, they stop their talking. Bill wrinkles his brow at the cut on Eddie's knee and Richie is already out of his chair, helping Eddie to sit down in his abandoned seat.

"You see It, too?" Richie asks. Eddie doesn't dignify the question with a response. "Don't be a bitch, Kaspbrak," Richie mutters, examining the grass stains on Eddie's shirt and the scrape on his elbow he had gotten in his haste to scramble away from the zombies chasing him.

"Learned from the best," Eddie says and Richie furrows his brow in confusion. Eddie waits a beat before continuing. "Your mother gives great lessons."

He sees Bill crack up out of the corner of his eye, a delirious laugh that makes his shoulders shake. Richie narrows his eyes, turning to look at Bill and then back at Eddie. Eddie can't help the smile that cracks through his stoic act, a grin that makes Richie's expression soften.

Then Richie's leaning forward and kissing Eddie, a quick press of lips. It's warm and familiar and Eddie can't even bring himself to be embarrassed that Bill's there. Richie moves back, cheeks pink, and walks over to the sink. He wets a towel with cool water and then settles down on his knees in front of Eddie's chair. He picks up Eddie's foot and takes his shoe off, untying the laces with nimble fingers, and then does the other shoe too.

Eddie can feel Bill's eyes watching them, tracking every movement as Richie rings the towel out and carefully cleans the blood that has dripped down Eddie's knee. Some of it is dried on his sock, a brown stain on the white cotton. He presses the wet cloth to the scrape on Eddie's knee and it stings for a just a moment and then is soothed.

Richie cleans his cut and then moves to the scrape on his elbow, turning Eddie's arm slowly to get access to it. He has a scrub a little to get a grass stain but he's tender and careful along the hurt skin, tracing it delicately. When he finally finishes, the wash cloth slightly pink and green, he sits back on his heels and gazes up at Eddie. He drops the washcloth and steadies himself on Eddie's spread knees.

“How are we gonna beat It?” Eddie asks, tearing his eyes from Richie to look at Bill. The man is watching them with intensity, absentmindedly picking at his fingernails. He blinks once, slowly, and licks his lips.

“Chud,” he says and Eddie has a distant memory of a plan. It had involved an ancient ritual of some kind, Chud. Something about locking tongues with It and spouting tongue twisters until it died? But they had failed back then.

“It didn’t work last time,” he can’t help but point out and he feels Richie’s fingers tighten just a little bit on his knees.

“T-that was my fault,” Bill says and Richie makes a noise of argument but Bill silences him with a hand. “It was and you k-know it. This damn s-s-stutter,” he says. He looks contemplative and Eddie sees him mouth something-- a fragment of a sentence. It looks like “he thrusts his fists” but Eddie can’t be sure.

Richie doesn’t respond. He uses Eddie’s knee to push himself up and walks out of the room. Eddie makes eye contact with Bill across the table and lifts his shoulder in a shrug before going downstairs to change.

Ben comes home next, looking sullen and scared, and tells them of seeing It at the library. He doesn’t elaborate, just walks to Mike’s liquor cabinet and takes a big swig of whiskey.

Bev is vicious when she arrives, slamming the front door and letting out a frustrated groan. Her blouse is dirty and there’s a handprint on her jeans. It’s dark, too dark to be blood, and Beverly doesn’t explain it. She just sighs. Eddie thinks she looks hopeless.

Mike is home last, late in the night, his key unlocking the door with a rattle. Bev has already retreated to bed, climbing the stairs and ignoring Ben’s look of worry. He follows her up the stairs despite her obvious want to be alone and Eddie silently wishes him luck. Richie is curled up on the armchair in the corner, close to sleep. Bill had just excused himself and Eddie can hear him pacing in the dining room, muttering something to himself.

Richie still hasn't told Eddie what he saw on his own walking tour.

Mike kicks his boots off and collapses onto the couch next to Eddie as Bill enters the room, looking fierce.

"I ruh-remembered," he says and they all swivel their heads to look at him. He's wild, eyes alight with a fire Eddie hasn't seen in years. "I s-said it once, I knew I did,"

"Said what?" Richie asks, voice rough. His glasses are crooked on his face.

"The tongue twister," Bill explains, "That fucking t-tongue twister my mom taught me that s-s-summer. I only got it out once,"

"Chud," Mike whispers. Bill nods.

"Chud," he agrees and Mike's face breaks into a smile.

"We've gotta find It tomorrow," Bill decides. Eddie feels a spike of anxiety, fear over starting their war so soon. They've just gotten here and Bill wants to kill them all already? "We're g-g-gonna end this f-fucking thing,"

He sinks down into the couch on the other side of Eddie, his knee knocking awkwardly against Eddie's as he gets comfortable.

They spend the rest of the night plotting, planning out what little attack plan they have. Richie falls asleep in the chair, neck turned at an awkward angle. Mike and Bill whisper over Eddie's head and Eddie can feel himself being lulled to sleep as well. The living room is warm and he can feel Bill's leg pressed to his on the couch. Just when he's about to give in, Mike nudges him.

"Time for bed," he declares, planting his hands on the coffee table and pushing himself up from the couch. He turns to climb the stairs to his room. "We'll discuss more in the morning," Eddie watches Bill stifle a yawn as Mike retreats.

"I'll get this one to bed," Eddie tells Bill, hooking a thumb in Richie's direction. Bill nods, looks like he wants to say something, but closes

his mouth and stands. He pats Eddie's shoulder, letting his hand linger in the fabric of Eddie's shirt and then he's leaving too, climbing the stairs lethargically.

"Rich," Eddie whispers, moving to shake his friend awake. "Richie," he repeats. Richie blinks awake after a moment, eyes hazy and confused. He furrows his brow and blinks slowly. "Time for bed, dude," Eddie says and Richie takes a deep breath in through his nose. He nods once and untangles himself out of the chair.

He follows Eddie down the basement steps, holding onto the back of Eddie's shirt and letting himself be guided.

By the time they're downstairs, Richie is wide awake. His eyes are clear and he bites at his lower lip with his teeth, worrying it.

Richie sits down on the couch, not yet pulled out into a bed, and Eddie takes the armchair across from him. Both of them know they aren't getting to bed anytime soon, pulses racing with anticipation for tomorrow, fear and excitement blending. Eddie can practically hear Richie's heartbeat, a fast rhythm that Eddie resists the urge to tap his toe alone with.

"What if it's our last night?" Richie says suddenly, standing to pace the room. His strides are long and erratic. "What if we fucking die tomorrow?" His question is rhetorical and Eddie doesn't answer.

Instead, he lets his head fall into his hands, balancing on his knees, and tries not to let the fear take over his life. He breathes deep and slow, lifting his shoulders. Richie's pacing lulls him into a rhythm of breath, in as Richie walks toward him and out when Richie turns to stalk back across the room.

"We're gonna beat It," he says finally into his hands, muffled. He hears Richie cease his pacing, the floorboards settling under his feet. "We've got to beat It,"

He raises his head to meet Richie's eyes and finds the other man staring at him. Richie nods once, more to himself than in agreement with Eddie's words and then he strides forward, sinking down in front of Eddie. His knees hit the carpet with a dull thud and then he's

pressing his mouth to Eddie's frantically. He doesn't give Eddie a moment to adjust, dropping his mouth open immediately.

His mouth is hot, wet and pulsing as he licks his tongue over Eddie's bottom lip. Eddie whimpers and cedes control to Richie, balancing on the edge of the chair and letting Richie press himself between his legs. He's sure the floor is killing Richie's knees but makes no move to pull Richie up and onto his lap.

Everything is great, except a distant part of Eddie feels like there's something missing. It's like there's a presence in the room with them that's invisible, a stake between them. Like they can get as close as they want and yet will still feel someone between them.

It's almost as if the mere act of Eddie noticing the absence is what draws Bill to them. Eddie feels a tug in his chest, a magnetic pull that stirs when Richie breaks apart from him to whisper.

"Someone's coming," he says against Eddie's lips and Eddie knows who it is.

They hear Bill before they see him, his steps tracking through the house until he opens the basement door. Eddie pushes Richie away from him, commanding him with dark eyes to go sit on the couch. He's not sure why he's so ashamed to have Bill catch them. Bill watched them kiss in the kitchen earlier tonight, but that was a chaste peck and what they're doing now is rapidly approaching making out.

Richie settles down onto the couch as Bill climbs down the stairs, socked feet brushing against the carpet. He looks almost embarrassed and Eddie knows that Bill realizes what they were doing. Richie's pink cheeks must give them away.

"Hey, Big Bill," Richie greets nonchalantly. "What brings you into our den?" Bill rubs the back of his neck with one hand.

"Y-you know, I'm n-n-not entirely s-sh-sure." Bill admits and goes to sit down next to Richie. He settles into the couch easily, leaning back into the plush fabric and drawing his knees up under himself. It's the pose of a child, something he'd done a thousand times at movie

nights when they were kids, but it looks out of place as an adult. Like he's trying to hide something.

"Bill," Richie starts, and Eddie is scared what's going to come out of his mouth. He looks melancholy and teasing at the same time, slipping back into the disaffected act that Eddie saw right through the first time they met. "Do you think we're gonna die tomorrow?"

Bill doesn't speak for a long time. At first, Eddie is worried he's hurt, that he's sad that Richie has no faith in them. Then, he wonders if Bill is mad. If he's angry at It for making them consider these questions. But after observing Bill's quiet state for a while, Eddie realizes that Bill is scared. Bill is terrified and the thought almost sends Eddie into hysterics. Bill's supposed to be the strong one, the protector. The man with the plan. What can they do if even Bill is frightened?

Finally, Bill speaks.

"We might," he starts and Eddie can tell it pains him to be so negative, "I think s-s-some of us could d-die." He pauses, "But I also think we're gonna win."

Richie tilts his head in response, furrowing his eyebrows.

"We're gonna k-k-kill It," Bill says, sounding confident. "It's gonna pay for what it did to us, to Guh-Georgie, and to S-St-Stan. I know that for certain." Richie is nodding now, clenching his fists into his pants and looking at Bill in reverence.

"If we die, we're taking that fucking clown down with us." It sounds like a invocation, like Bill is offering their mortal souls in exchange to take down the evil that has cursed them and this town. His voice shakes with power and Eddie is drawn to him. He sees Richie lean over to lock hands with Bill and he shakes like he's been recharged. Richie reaches out his other hand to set it on Eddie's knee and he feels a surge of power pulse into him, the hand on his knee hot.

They've formed a circuit, a generator.

"No matter what happens tomorrow," Richie whispers, his hand

squeezing Eddie's knee, "I love you guys."

"I love you too," Eddie says, feeling his eyes fill with unexplainable tears. Bill hums in agreement and rolls his eyes when Richie looks at him with a pout.

"F-fine. I love you guys, too," he allows and Richie smiles softly. He waits just a moment, tilting his head to the side in consideration, and then he leans in to kiss Bill.

Eddie isn't sure if it's their first kiss. He can't remember either of them ever mentioning anything during childhood, but he also knows their bond is deeper than he'd ever known before. They kiss like it's a familiar act, Bill running a hand up Richie's arm to tangle in his hair and Richie opening his mouth to allow Bill's tongue in.

After a moment, their kiss grows heated, heavy with anticipation and adrenaline. Richie lets out a soft sigh into Bill's mouth and Eddie feels the skin of his neck heat with a flush that extends to his toes. His blood feels heavy in his veins and his heartbeat is loud in his own ears. Richie's hand leaves his knee and Eddie feels the loss in his bones.

Bill and Richie kiss like they're fighting. Their styles when they kiss Eddie have been alike, both wanting to lead. Richie had always been enthusiastic, kissing Eddie like he wanted to devour. He had kissed like he wanted to commit every moment to memory, like he was taking mental pictures. Bill had kissed him slowly and shyly, but always in control. Bill kissed like he knew Eddie wasn't gonna go anywhere, like they had all the time in the world.

Together they're a powder keg, one match away from blowing each other up.

They battle for a while, groaning softly into each other's mouths, until Eddie sees something shift in Bill's shoulders, a tension releasing. Then it's obvious that Richie's in control, licking into Bill's mouth and breathing loudly through his nose. Bill is just along for the ride and Eddie is suddenly blindsided by the need to be with them. He clenches a fist in the fabric of his shorts.

Finally, finally, Richie and Bill break apart with a wet sound that makes Eddie blush. Richie leans his head down just a bit to leave one last peck on the corner of Bill's mouth and then he's turning toward Eddie, beckoning him over with dark eyes and a sweet smile. Eddie is unable to resist his siren call.

He moves to sit on the other side of them but Richie grabs an arm around his waist and pulls him into the middle. He comes down hard on top of one of Bill's legs.

"Ow, Richie," Eddie complains and the other man shrugs.

"Just wanted you in the middle, Eds," he replies and Eddie flushes all the way down to his bones. He hears Bill chuckle behind him, breath just barely brushing Eddie's hair, and he turns to see Bill smiling with almost sharp-looking teeth. As if Eddie's a snack waiting to be devoured. Bill locks eyes with him for a moment and then he moves forward slowly, letting Eddie have all the time in the world to move away if he wants. Eddie doesn't want to.

Instead, he leans forward the last few inches and presses his mouth to Bill's. It's sweet at first, but then Bill leans to the side and opens his mouth just a little bit. His lips are wet from Richie's spit, Eddie realizes, and suppresses a full body shiver at the thought.

Unfortunately, Richie feels the tension in his shoulders as he tries not to react and misunderstands it. He leans forward, his chest pressing against Eddie's back.

"You ok, Eds?" he asks, concerned, and then Bill is moving back and away. His blue eyes are hesitant and his lips are cherry red and Eddie scrambles.

"It's fine, I'm fine, I'm good," he promises, turning slightly to try and meet Richie's eye. Bill furrows his brows.

"I-if you don't wuh-wanna d-do anything, you d-don't have to," Bill argues, ever the gentleman, and Eddie wants to punch him.

"I'm sure," Eddie says and Richie laughs at his bitchy tone.

"I think maybe he was just trying not to enjoy himself too much, Big

Bill,” Richie says and Eddie can hear the smirk in his voice. Sometimes he wonders what he sees in the idiot.

“Beep beep, Richie,” Eddie says and leans forward again to capture Bill’s lips. This time he doesn’t think about Richie’s tongue in Bill’s mouth just a few moments ago and focuses on running a hand up Bill’s arm carefully to tangle his fingers in the short hair at the nape of Bill’s neck. But then Richie ruins his whole train of thought by pressing into Eddie’s back and beginning to lay open mouthed kisses on the back of Eddie’s neck and shoulders. Eddie shudders and breaks his kiss with Bill to take a deep breath against Bill’s cheek, eyes closed.

Bill takes the opportunity to trace his lips down Eddie’s cheek and onto his jawline. He moves so slow and Eddie loses himself in the feeling of Richie at his back and Bill at his front. He can feel his temperature rising, a bit of sweat dotting his hairline, and his fingers go lax on Bill’s hair. He leans back further into Richie and shifts as Bill climbs between his legs and then they’re all leaning back so Richie can rest against the arm of the couch.

The new position means Eddie is effectively trapped, pinned between Bill’s abdomen and Richie’s entire body, his shoulders digging into Richie’s chest and his thighs spread.

He couldn’t move away if he tried and he really, really doesn’t want to try.

Bill maps back up from his collarbones, sucking at his neck as Richie watches. Bill looks up at Eddie through thin eyelashes, lips pressed against Eddie’s pulse, and then Eddie assumes Bill catches Richie’s eye because he moves back up and balances his arms on either side of Eddie to kiss Richie.

They aren’t fighting anymore, Eddie can tell. Instead, Richie is letting Bill take the reins. He lays back and relaxes further and Eddie feels the vibrations of him making low sounds deep in his chest.

The problem with their new position is that Eddie is now uncomfortably aware of his arousal. He’s straining against the front of his shorts and every time Bill shifts a little to get closer to Richie,

he rubs his hip against Eddie's erection.

He knows Bill has to have noticed by now, but the other man says nothing and continues to kiss Richie, rocking forward every few moments. It's then that Eddie realizes Bill is hard too, rubbing against Eddie's thigh with shallow movements.

Eddie lets out an embarrassing moan and his head thunks against Richie's shoulder. Richie laughs again, his chest bouncing.

"Have we been abandoning you?" he asks playfully and Eddie doesn't reward him with an answer. Bill's eyes are twinkling in the low light and he leans back onto his heels. Then Richie is shifting, moving so he can turn his head down and kiss Eddie. He picks up right where they left off earlier.

Richie kisses Eddie like he's precious. He kisses him like it's been minutes since the last time they were together instead of nearing twenty years. It's familiar and bittersweet. He kisses reverently, like he's trying to commit the every moment to memory, and keep it this time instead of forgetting. His eyelashes brush against Eddie's cheek and his hand wraps around to cup the side of Eddie's face, though Eddie's sure the position's killing him.

Eddie forgets about Bill for a while, forgets about everything that isn't the slide of Richie's mouth against his. He forgets until Bill leans forward again, thigh rubbing Eddie's dick, and starts sucking on Eddie's collarbone.

Then Richie is reaching down, in between Eddie's arm and his body, and pressing a palm into the front of Eddie's shorts. Eddie's hips twitch up involuntarily, into the heat of Richie's hand, and he lets out a groan.

Richie smirks against Eddie's lips and presses down harder, rocking a little with a clumsy rhythm that has Eddie breaking their kiss to stutter out a curse. Eddie can feel Richie's erection against his back and he bites his lip to keep from moaning.

Bill smiles against Eddie's chest and Eddie can see that he's left bruises in his wake, blossoming purple and blue on Eddie's pale skin.

He wonders what it would be like to have Bill leave bruises in other places, like his hips and inner thighs. It's a dangerous thought and it leaves him careening quickly toward the edge.

Soon he can't do anything except huff out breaths, face pressed closed to Richie's as they both watch Bill kiss Eddie's neck. He's sweating for real now, slick forehead and cheeks sliding against Richie's own. He squeezes his eyes closed and tries really, really hard not to come.

"Little help here, Bill?" Richie says, breaking him out of his concentration, and Eddie opens his eyes, confused until Bill smiles a wicked smile and leans back so Richie can worm his hand into the front of Eddie's shorts. He grasps Eddie in hand and starts pumping and Eddie is really gonna come now and it's gonna be so embarrassing.

He moans aloud and slides his hands up Bill's abdomen, rucking up his shirt, and grabs hard onto Bill's bare waist, pulling him back in. Bill follows and latches back onto Eddie's chest, pulling Eddie's shirt down as far as he can. Eddie's fingernails dig into the soft skin of Bill's hips and Bill groans against his clavicle.

Richie's hand is big and his grip is strong and then Bill sinks his teeth hard into Eddie's collarbone and suddenly he's coming, back arching off Richie's chest, his thighs tensing around Bill's hips. He can feel Richie shudder under him when he realizes what's happening, hips bucking into Eddie's lower back, but he doesn't slow his hand until Eddie's twitching with the aftershocks, his thighs clenching. Richie stills behind him for just a moment, sighing lightly in his ear, but then continues touching Eddie. Eventually he has to bat Richie's hand away as he collapses back, letting the tension bleed out of his shoulders.

Richie's arms come up around him and cross over his chest in a hug, careful to not get his wet hand on Eddie's shirt, but the gesture of cleanliness is useless. Eddie can feel come cooling on his lower stomach, sticking to his shirt and shorts, and he reaches down to tuck himself back into his underwear uncomfortably.

"Was that as good for you guys as it was for me?" Richie says and

Eddie musters the only strength he has left in him to elbow Richie as hard as he can in the stomach.

"I hate you," he says and Richie just holds him harder. Bill's eyes are dancing with laughter but all Eddie can think about is the bulge in Bill's jeans and how much he wants to see Bill shake apart. He moves to sit up but Richie is stronger than he is.

"Let me go, you fuck," he argues but Bill is already off the couch, adjusting himself in his pants like he thinks Eddie won't notice.

"I'm g-good," Bill says, catching Eddie's eye. "I'll take a c-c-cold s-shower,"

"Bill," Eddie starts, but Richie silences him with a tap on his hip.

"Let him go," Richie whispers in Eddie's ear as Bill walks off, slightly awkward. He goes up the basement stairs and Eddie listens to his feet track through the house before he hears the water in the downstairs bathroom go on.

"Are you good?" Eddie asks as Richie relinquishes his grip and allows Eddie to sit up and face him. He finally gets a good look at Richie and sees swollen lips and messy hair. His shirt is half rucked up, showing off his sweaty stomach, and Eddie's loses all sense of speech as he sees a wet spot on the front of Richie's corduroys.

"You came all over my hand," Richie says, "Believe me; I'm good," and then he actually brings said hand up and licks it and Eddie is torn between thinking it's the grossest thing he's ever seen and also the hottest.

"You're a dick, Richie," he manages, mouth dry. Richie laughs and wipes his hand on the thigh of his pants, leaving a smeared stain, and Eddie hates him.

"I don't know about you, but I need a cigarette," Richie says and gets up, knees cracking as he stands. He pats his back pocket and pulls out a smushed carton of marlboros and offers one out to Eddie. Eddie sighs and follows him up the basement stairs.

They go out on Mike's back porch and light up, passing the smoke

back and forth. Richie sprawls out on one of the wicker chairs and blinks sleepy eyes at Eddie in the hazy light of the moon.

The stars shine over Derry, illuminating the sky, and Eddie wonders if anyone out there knows. If they know of the evil that exists in their world, hidden away in some small town in Maine. If they know that they're all pawns in the game, an ancient fight between good and evil that spans hundreds of thousands of years.

He wonders if they have any chance at all to beat this thing. If they have any hope of killing it without losing their own lives in the process.

And then Bill walks out onto the porch, toweling his hair dry. He's changed into pajamas, an old pair of sweats and a Mets shirt that's one size too small. It rides up on his stomach as he collapses into the chair next to Richie. The other man offers him the smoke and Bill takes it in two fingers and breathes in deeply, chest heaving. He exhales into the night and the smoke curls toward the sky lazily.

He and Richie get into an argument about the virtue of cold showers, Richie smirking, the darkening bruise Bill gave him on the side of his neck standing in stark contrast to his pale skin. Bill smiles an easy smile and lights another cigarette, tipping his head back to blow out smoke in a huff of laughter as Richie says something dumb. His eyes are clear in the moonlight and he meets Eddie's gaze. He smiles, something soft and private, and then shoots back an insult at Richie out of the side of his mouth. Richie howls with laughter, doubling over and clutching his stomach dramatically. Bill shushes him, reminding him of the time, and Richie flicks him off in response.

Eddie watches the two of them; his two best friends. The two people he loves most in the world. The two people he would die for.

He looks at them, smiles, and thinks that everything is going to be all right.

Author's Note:

and then they go into the sewer and beat It and eddie kaspbrak certainly does NOT die in richie's arms NO SIR!!

the title for this is from "crazy baby" by joan osborne. give it a listen because it fits these sweet boys so well it makes me cry.

series title is from "the river" by manchester orchestra which is my go-to crying song!

come visit me on tumblr @cryingbilddenbrough if you want updates on future fics!